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MELKSHAM URBAN DISTRICT



ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

Medical Officer
of Health

1925

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Printed by W. Bolwell, The Electric Press, Lowbourn



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Medical Officer of Health
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*To the Chairman and Members of the Melksham
Urban District Council.*

GENTLEMEN,

I beg to submit this Annual Report of the state of the public health in Melksham during 1925. In framing this report I have endeavoured to follow the requirements of Circular 648 of December 10th, 1925, but as you will see it is quite impossible for me to furnish some of the particulars required. It must also be remembered that the Urban District does not include the whole of that area which is popularly supposed to comprise the town of Melksham.

Natural and Social Conditions of the Area.

Area, 624 acres.

Population, Census 1921, 3,593 ; 1925 (Estimated), 3,690.

Physical features and general character of the area. The major portion of the area is composed of a thick bed of Oxford clay of the middle oolite formation, with here and there beds of gravel and alluvia drift. The River Avon runs through the district and the derelict Wilts and Berks Canal borders the south eastern boundary, and the town is liable to extensive flooding.

The climate is moist and relaxing. The chief industries of the area are rubber manufacture, feather purifying, saw milling, and the manufacture of condensed milk.

The number of inhabited houses in 1921 was 814, and the estimated number in 1925 was about 900.

The number of families or separate occupiers in 1921 was 903, and the estimated number in 1925 was 1,026.

The rateable value is £16,838, and the assessable value is £15,315. The sum represented by a penny rate on the assessable value is £64 12s. 11d.

Vital Statistics.

Deaths. 37, of which 20 were males and 17 females. Under one year, 4.

The Infantile death rate was 86·9 per 1,000 births.

The Zymotic death rate was nil.

The Influenza death rate was 1·38 per 1,000 of the population.

The Tuberculosis death rate was nil.

The Cancer death rate was 1·08.

The Annual Recorded death rate was 10·02, whereas the death rate for England and Wales was 12·2 per 1,000 population.

Births. 46, of which 15 were legitimate males and 1 illegitimate, and 27 legitimate females and 3 illegitimate. The birth rate is therefore 12·46 per 1,000 and is to be compared with the birth rate for the total population which is 18·3 per 1,000.

The amount of out relief under the Poor Law was £131 13s. 0d.

The Melksham Cottage Hospital, an entirely voluntary institution has again increased the number of admissions. The total number being 280, of which 135 were resident in your district. The work of this institution is mainly surgical, as is the case in the majority of non-teaching hospitals.

General Provision of Health Services in the Area.

Hospitals supported wholly or partly by the Wilts County Council.

(i) Tuberculosis.

(a) Pulmonary—Winsley Sanatorium, near Bath ; Harnwood Hospital, near Salisbury.

(b) Non-Pulmonary—Savernake Hospital, Marlborough ; Bath Orthopædic Hospital.

At this juncture I should like to point out that there appears to be a general impression in the district that only hopeless cases of pulmonary tuberculosis are sent to Harnwood Hospital, and there is therefore a general disinclination on the part of phthisical patients to avail themselves of treatment in this institution. The facts are that there is generally more accommodation at the last named institution, and that therefore there is a larger proportion of severe cases treated there, but there is also a considerable number of early cases, and as far as I can ascertain such cases make equally satisfactory improvement at either institutions.

(ii) *Maternity.* None in the area, but any cases for which institutional treatment is considered advisable by the medical man in charge of the case (provided such medical man is on the staff of the Melksham Cottage Hospital) can be admitted to that hospital.

(iii) *Infectious Disease.* There is an Isolation Hospital at Trowbridge to which infectious cases may be sent for isolation and treatment.

(iv) *Small Pox.* These cases can be treated and isolated by arrangement between the local Medical Officer and the County Medical Officer.

(v) *Institutional Provision for Unmarried Mothers.* There is none in the area, but there is such an institution at Mere, the admission to which is not restricted to any part of the country.

Ambulance Facilities. Infectious cases. Ambulance attached to the Isolation Hospital. Accident cases are dealt with by Red Cross Ambulances from Trowbridge or Devizes.

Clinics and Treatment Centres.

(i) There is a voluntary Maternity and Child Welfare centre at Melksham.

(ii) The Tuberculosis dispensary for this area is held on Wednesday mornings at Bythesea Road Schools, Trowbridge, at which the County Tuberculosis Officer attends.

(iii) The Treatment Centre for Venereal Disease is at the Royal United Hospital, Bath. Times of attendance: Men, Friday, 5 to 7 p.m. Women: Tuesdays, 5 to 7 p.m.

Public Health Officers.

One part time Medical Officer of Health (also Certifying Surgeon).

One part time Sanitary Inspector, M.R. San. I.

One part time Meat Inspector.

Midwives. There is no subsidy to the practising Midwives by the Local Authority. There is one District Nurse, a qualified midwife, mentioned in the previous paragraph. There are also three other qualified midwives resident in the area, but their practices are not confined to the area.

Legislation in Force.

Public Health Acts (Amendment) Act, 1890 ; Part iii.

Public Health Act (Amendment) Act, 1907 ; Part ii, Part iii, Part vi and Part x.

Public Health Act, 1925 ; Parts ii to iv inclusive (excepting Sections 21, 22 and 44).

Professional Nursing in the Home.

(a) General. There is one district nurse, who in addition to her maternity work, undertakes general nursing of a non-infectious character.

(b) There is no provision for the nursing of infectious cases, such as measles in the patients' homes.

The District Nurse is supported by the Melksham Nursing Association which is responsible by means of subscriptions and donations for her maintenance. There is no co-ordination with the Local Authority.

Sanitary Circumstances of the Area.

Water. The whole of the area is supplied by the Trowbridge Water Company, the supply in 1925 shewed a distinct improvement on previous years. No notice was made of any contamination during the year under review.

Rivers and Streams. No pollution of the river or streams in the area was noted by me or reported to me during the year.

The Sewerage Works are efficiently managed but their proximity to the north-west part of the area is such that at certain times and with the wind in a north-westerly direction there is an unavoidable nuisance. It is also to be noted that the capacity of these works is not unlimited and that if the drained area is increased to a much greater extent, the works will also have to be extended.

Closet Accommodation. In certain places this is undoubtedly deficient and steps are now being taken to remedy this. I regret I am unable to give any detailed statement with regard to various types of closet in use in the area, nor am I able to give the number of each type of closet or privy in the area. Only one case of nuisance from this source was brought to my notice last year and this was satisfactorily dealt with.

Scavenging. There is a bi-weekly collection for the removal and disposal of house refuse. Earth closets and privies are not cleansed through the Local Authority.

Sanitary Inspection of the Area—

(a) 46 Inspections.

Slaughter Houses	...	12
Bakehouses	...	24
Factories	...	10

(b) No statutory notices were served.

Smoke abatement There was no nuisance from smoke noticed by or reported to me during 1925.

Premises and Occupations which can be controlled by bye-laws and regulations. There are none such in this area.

Schools. The sanitary condition and water supply of the schools in the area is satisfactory. Both schools were closed for measles during the early part of the year.

Housing. The general housing conditions are gradually improving and though there is still a marked shortage of houses, in my opinion the situation is not more acute in this area than it is in other similar areas. Extensive building of houses suitable for the present need is being carried out during 1926. It is naturally impossible, giving a housing shortage to begin with, to also cope satisfactorily with the increasing population of an industrial town such as this.

The only cases of overcrowding reported to me last year were those of tenants, who, having taken lodgers, wished after a time to get rid of them, generally, it appeared, for domestic reasons.

The general standard of housing, with a few noteworthy exceptions, is quite up to the average. In these exceptions it has been noted that in a block of similar houses, whereas one or two show no cause for complaint the remainder are ill-kept and insanitary. In all cases reported to me where the defects are due to the lack of proper management and supervision by the owners, steps have been taken which have satisfactorily remedied the insanitary condition of affairs.

It is obviously impossible for me to condemn any unfit house while the shortage remains as it is, but as stated above, the time does not appear far distant when it will be impossible to take these steps in necessary cases.

Housing Statistics for the Year 1925.

Number of new houses erected during the year :—

(a) Total (including numbers given separately under	
(b)	23

(b) *With State assistance under the Housing Acts :—*

(i) By the Local Authority	16
(ii) By other bodies or persons	7

1. *Unfit Dwelling Houses.*

Inspection—(1) Total number of dwelling

houses inspected for housing defects (under Public Health or Housing Acts) ...	13
(2) Number of dwelling houses which were inspected and recorded under the Housing (Inspection of District) Regulations, 1910, or the Housing Consolidated Regulations, 1925 ...	—
(3) Number of dwelling houses found to be in a state so dangerous or injurious to health as to be unfit for human habitation ...	—
(4) Number of dwelling houses (exclusive of those referred to under the preceding sub-head) found not to be in all respects reasonably fit for human habitation ...	11
2. <i>Remedy of defects without service of formal Notices.</i> Number of defective dwelling houses rendered fit in consequence of informal action by the Local Authority or their Officers ...	9
3. <i>Action under Statutory Powers.</i> A. Proceedings under section 3 of the Housing Act, 1925.	
(1) Number of dwelling houses in respect of which notices were served requiring repairs ...	} Nil
(2) Number of dwelling houses which were rendered fit after service of formal notices :— (a) By owners ... (b) By Local Authority in default of owners ...	
(3) Number of dwelling houses in respect of which Closing Orders became operative in pursuance of declarations by owners of intention to close ...	
B. Proceedings under Public Health Acts.	
(1) Number of dwelling houses in respect of which notices were served requiring defects to be remedied ...	} Nil
(2) Number of dwelling houses in which defects were remedied after service of formal notices :— (a) By owners ... (b) By Local Authority in default of owners ...	

C. Proceedings under Sections 11, 14 and 15 of the Housing Act, 1925.

(1) Number of representations made with a view to the making of Closing Orders	}	Nil
(2) Number of dwelling houses in respect of which Closing Orders were made ...		
(3) Number of dwelling houses in respect of which Closing Orders were determined, the dwelling houses having been rendered fit... 		
(4) Number of dwelling houses in respect of which Demolition Orders were made		
(5) Number of dwelling houses demolished in pursuance of Demolition Orders		

Inspection and Supervision of Food.

Milk Supply. This area lies in the middle of one of the most important dairy farming districts in the country and the milk factories are all satisfactorily inspected and controlled from their respective head-quarters. Furthermore, from time to time, accompanied by the Sanitary Inspector, I have inspected the dairy farms in my areas, and every endeavour has been made to ensure the supply and distribution of milk of a pure and wholesome character.

Meat. (i) Systematic meat inspection is carried out by the meat inspector, who receives notice of any intended slaughter and makes his inspection at the time.

(ii) The Public Health (Meat) Regulations, 1924, are in force and are being carried out.

(iii) There is no public abattoir.

There were three registered slaughter houses in 1925 as in 1921.

Other Foods. There are six bakehouses in the area. All were systematically inspected and the existing powers have been found quite adequate for dealing with sanitary conditions in these places.

Food Poisoning. No case of food poisoning was reported to me.

Sale of Food and Drugs Act. This is administered by the Wilts County Council

Prevalence and Control over Infectious Disease.

Infectious Diseases generally. Since 1920 the incidence of notifiable infectious disease has been low. During 1925, one case of Diphtheria only was reported and this case was imported from Ammanford, South Wales. One case also of Pneumonia was reported. The first mentioned case was

admitted to hospital, and the second was not. Neither case died. There was also a case of encephalitis Lethargica which was sent to the Royal United Hospital, Bath, before sufficient time had elapsed for a diagnosis to be made here. A week after admission to hospital, the case was diagnosed as from Bath and did not therefore come in these returns. All rooms and bedding of infected persons are disinfected under the control of the Sanitary Inspector, who is notified by me whenever a case is reported. With regard to the non-notifiable infectious diseases such as measles, I receive during epidemics or when such cases occur, weekly returns from the head teachers of the elementary schools, and if deemed necessary and after consultation with the County Medical Officer, the school is closed until such time as the epidemic abates sufficiently to warrant it. Personally I do not believe that the closure of schools has much effect on the prevention or spread of the disease, especially in urban districts, but I do think that such a proceeding is exceedingly valuable in that it prevents children in the early stages from being sent out into cold and inclement weather, thereby increasing their chances of succumbing to severe complications.

Tuberculosis. New cases, 1925.

Age periods.	Pulmonary.		Non-pulmonary.		Deaths.
	M	F	M	F	
5—10	0	0	0	1	Nil.
20—25	1	0	1	0	
25—35	1	1	0	0	
65 and upwards	0	0	0	1	

There is no tuberculous person employed in the milk trade in this area.

Maternity and Child Welfare.

The district nurse is responsible to the county authorities for all reports, returns and notifications. She is also inspected from the County Offices.

There is no clinic for expectant mothers, and in my opinion the establishment of such a clinic is not desirable.

Orthopædic Centres are available for children of school age. These are maintained by the County Council.

There is a *Child Welfare Clinic* held every fortnight.

There has been no puerperal fever, ophthalmia neonatorum or death among parturient women.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

D. LEIGH SPENCE,

M.A., M.B., B.Ch., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.,

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

